

UNITED NATIONS

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# THE UNITED NATIONS

## *Blueprint for Peace*

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THIS SYMBOLIC FIGURE represents all of us, everyone on earth, whoever we are, without distinction of any kind such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or any other status

## THE UNITED NATIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

**H**UMAN RIGHTS, as we know them, are the result of centuries of struggle, intellectual development, and law enforcement. These basic rights, proclaimed as the keystones of democracy and social morality, are achievements of human organization, and, although hard won, are easily lost and adulterated. The concept of what constitutes rights changes from culture to culture and from period to period, making it necessary for every new generation in every country to evaluate its definition of human rights.

Many of the rights we in America consider fundamental to our existence were not recognized in this country only a few generations ago, and are still not understood in many parts of the world. In this generation the right to public assistance has been firmly established in a manner completely foreign to the early years of the century. Within our memories, the feeding of indigent families was not considered the responsibility of the state. Not so long ago, education was a privilege conferred on upper-class families by virtue of their status in the community. All Americans now feel that they have the right to a high-school education and the principle is slowly being extended to include college education.

Historically, similar changes have taken place. The rights of ancient Greek citizens were not extended to the entire community, and in medieval times the rights of men depended upon their birthright and sword. In our world, millions in Asia and Africa live under a caste system that deprives them of full citizenship. In most of the nations of the world, minority groups or special classes are denied full privileges. In some countries the rights of citizenship are explicitly stated in charters, constitutions, and legal documents. In other places, privileges and responsibilities are recognized by custom and are not in writing. In some modern countries, rights are given and taken away at the whim of the government in power.

World War II demonstrated, in the most frightening terms, how fragile the structure of human rights is. Nazi doctrines recognized no rights, not even those of the Germans. Cynical disregard for people spread to Italy, and to France under the Vichy regime. Not only Nazi Germans but Austrians, Czechs, Slovaks, Bulgarians